



Rod Underhill, District Attorney
1021 SW Fourth Avenue, Room 600
Portland, OR 97204-1193
Phone: 503-988-3162 Fax: 503-988-3643
www.mcda.us

November 23, 2019

Court sentences man to 90 days in jail, orders him to write an essay for yelling 'go back to your country' and then spitting in a person's face

Today, Multnomah County District Attorney Rod Underhill announced that 37-year-old Harold Eugene Denson III will have to write a 500-word essay after he told an immigrant to "go back to your country" and then spit in that person's face.

"This is a unique resolution to a very serious incident," said Multnomah County Deputy District Attorney Nicole Hermann who prosecuted this case. "Mr. Denson needs to understand the impact his actions had on the victim and our immigrant communities. This is an opportunity for him to reconcile his behavior through compassion, learning and understanding."

On November 22, 2019, Denson pleaded no contest to one count of unlawful use of a weapon and one count of bias crime in the second degree. Multnomah County Circuit Court Judge Christopher A. Ramras proposed the idea of having Denson write the essay as part of the sentence imposed.

Denson received 90 days of jail with credits for time served on the unlawful use of a weapon conviction.

He now has until March to complete the essay, which the court ordered be focused on the process and challenges people can have when moving to the United States from another country.

If the court accepts Denson's essay, the state and the victim both support the court allowing Denson to withdraw his plea to the bias crime charge. The charge would then be dismissed.

However, if Denson does not complete the essay in the appropriate time or it does not meet the court's requirements, Denson will be convicted of the bias crime and could face additional sanction.

This investigation started on August 25, 2019 when the victim, an immigrant from Ukraine, was working at a local car dealership. As the manager, he was told that there was someone on property who had thrown trash all over. The victim grabbed a trash bag and approached the male, who was later identified as Denson. He gave Denson the trash bag and asked him to clean up the area.

Denson initially said thank you, which prompted the victim start walking away. However, Denson suddenly became agitated and started yelling that the car dealership was not the victim's property and proclaimed it was "American soil."

Denson asked the victim if he was American and where he was born. The victim turned around and briefly spoke with Denson who became more agitated. Denson spit in the victim's face and told him to go back to his own country.

Denson reached down and picked up a box cutter, with the blade extended, and pointed it at the victim and threatened to cut him.

The victim was able to separate himself. Police responded and located Denson nearby and recovered a box cutter from his pocket upon arrest.

The Multnomah County District Attorney's Office was an active participant of the Oregon Attorney General's Hate Crimes Task Force and helped draft the language that was in Senate Bill 577. The law, which went into effect on July 15, 2019, renamed the crime of "intimidation" to "bias crime," added gender identity to the list of protected categories and removed the requirement that two or more people commit the crime in order to make it a felony in certain circumstances.

All potential bias crime cases, whether they are a felony or misdemeanor, are reviewed by the Violent Crimes Unit within the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office. If a misdemeanor crime is issued, the felony-level attorney will retain the case.

Last month, Multnomah County District Attorney Rod Underhill and other members of the office attended the fourth annual Building Bridges of Understanding in Our Community event hosted by the Muslim Educational Trust in Tigard, Oregon as part of the office's efforts to combat bias crime. To read more about that event click [here](#).

If you are the victim of a bias crime assault or you are witnessing one, immediately call 9-1-1. If you are the victim of a bias crime and the suspect is no longer present or if you have information about a bias crime committed in the past, call the non-emergency line at 503-823-3333.

#MCDA#

Contact: Brent Weisberg, Communications Director
Multnomah County District Attorney's Office
Phone: 503.988.6567 | Email: Brent.Weisberg@mcdca.us